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ABSTRACT

This digest reviews behaviors and instructional strategies that enable teachers to build stronger teaching/learning relationships with students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Strategies include: (1) appreciate and accommodate the similarities and differences among the students' cultures; (2) build relationships with students; (3) focus on the ways students learn, and observe students to identify their task orientations; (4) teach students to match their behaviors to the setting; (5) use a variety of instructional strategies and learning activities; (6) consider students' cultures and language skills when developing learning objectives and instructional activities; (7) incorporate objectives for affective and personal development; (8) communicate expectations; (9) provide rationales; (10) use advance- and post-organizers; (11) provide frequent reviews of the content learned; (12) facilitate independence in thinking and action; (13) promote student on-task behavior; (14) monitor students' academic progress during lessons and independent work; (15) provide frequent feedback; and (16) require students to master one task before going on to the next. (CR)

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# ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON DISABILITIES AND GIFTED EDUCATION

## ERIC/OSEP DIGEST

# CRITICAL BEHAVIORS AND STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

By

JANE BURNETTE

NOVEMBER 1999

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education
The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1589
1-800-328-0272; ericec@cec.sped.org; http://ericec.org

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# Critical Behaviors and Strategies for Teaching Culturally Diverse Students

Jane Burnette

There are many school factors that affect the success of culturally diverse students: the school's atmosphere and overall attitudes toward diversity, involvement of the community, and culturally responsive curriculum, to name a few. Of all of these factors, the personal and academic relationships between teachers and their students may be the most influential. This relationship has been referred to as the "core relationship" of learning: the roles of teachers and students, the subject matter and their interaction in the classroom.

Certain behaviors and instructional strategies enable teachers to build a stronger teaching/learning relationship with their culturally diverse students. Many of these behaviors and strategies exemplify standard practices of good teaching, and others are specific to working with students from diverse cultures. A number of these behaviors and strategies are listed below.

## Teacher Behaviors

**Appreciate and accommodate the similarities and differences among the students' cultures.** Effective teachers of culturally diverse students acknowledge both individual and cultural differences enthusiastically and identify these differences in a positive manner. This positive identification creates a basis for developing effective communication and instructional strategies. Social skills such as respect and cross-cultural understanding can be modeled, taught, prompted and reinforced by the teacher.

**Build relationships with your students.** Interviews with African-American high school students who presented behavior challenges for staff revealed that they wanted their teachers to discover what their lives were like outside of school and that they wanted an opportunity to partake in the school's reward systems. Developing an understanding of students' lives also enables the teacher to increase the relevance of lessons and make examples more meaningful.

**Focus on the ways students learn and observe students to identify their task orientations.** Once students' orientations are known, the teacher can structure tasks to take them into account. For example, before some students can begin a task, they need time to prepare or attend to details. In this case, the teacher can allow time for students to prepare, provide them with advance organizers, and announce how much time will be given for preparation and when the task will begin. This is a positive way to honor their need for preparation, rituals, or customs.

**Teach students to match their behaviors to the setting.** We all behave differently in different settings. For example, we behave more formally at official ceremonies. Teaching students the differences between their home, school and community settings can help them switch to appropriate behavior for each context. For example, a teacher may talk about the differences between conversations with friends in the community and conversations with adults at school and discuss how each behavior is valued and useful in that setting. While some students adjust their behavior automatically, others must be taught and provided ample opportunities to practice. Involving families and the community can help students learn to adjust their behavior in each of the settings in which they interact.

## Instructional Strategies

**Use a variety of instructional strategies and learning activities.** Offering variety provides students with opportunities to learn in ways that are responsive to their own communication styles, cognitive styles, and aptitudes. In addition, the variety helps them develop and strengthen other approaches to learning.

**Consider students' cultures and language skills when developing learning objectives and instructional activities.** Facilitate comparable learning opportunities for students with differing characteristics. For example, consider opportunities for students who differ in appearance, race, sex, disability, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or ability.

**Incorporate objectives for affective and personal development.** Provide increased opportunities for high- and low-achievers to boost their self-esteem, develop positive self-attributes, and enhance their strengths and talents. Such opportunities can enhance students' motivation to learn and achieve.

**Communicate expectations.** Let the students know the "classroom rules" about talking, verbal participation in lessons,

and moving about the room. Tell them how long a task will take to complete or how long it will take to learn a skill or strategy, and when appropriate, give them information on their ability to master a certain skill or complete a task. For example, it may be necessary to encourage students who expect to achieve mastery but are struggling to do so. They may need to know that they have the ability to achieve mastery, but must work through the difficulty.

**Provide rationales.** Explain the benefits of learning a concept, skill, or task. Ask students to tell you the rationale for learning and explain how the concept or skill applies to their lives at school, home, and work.

**Use advance- and post-organizers.** At the beginning of lessons, give the students an overview and tell them the purpose or goal of the activity. If applicable, tell them the order that the lesson will follow and relate it to previous lessons. At the end of the lesson, summarize its main points.

**Provide frequent reviews of the content learned.** For example, check with the students to see if they remember the difference between simple and compound sentences. Provide a brief review of the previous lesson before continuing on to a new and related lesson.

**Facilitate independence in thinking and action.** There are many ways to facilitate students' independence. For example, when students begin their work without specific instruction from the teacher, they are displaying independence. When students ask questions, the teacher can encourage independence by responding in a way that lets the student know how to find the answer for him- or herself. When teachers ask students to evaluate their own work or progress, they are facilitating independence, and asking students to perform for the class (e.g., by reciting or role-playing) also promotes independence.

**Promote student on-task behavior.** Keeping students on-task maintains a high level of intensity of instruction. By starting lessons promptly and minimizing transition time between lessons, teachers can help students stay on-task. Shifting smoothly (no halts) and efficiently (no wasted effort) from one lesson to another and being business like about housekeeping tasks such as handing out papers and setting up audiovisual equipment helps to maintain their attention. Keeping students actively involved in the lessons—for example, by asking questions that require students to recall information—also helps them to stay focused and increases the intensity of instruction.

**Monitor students' academic progress during lessons and independent work.** Check with students during seatwork to see if they need assistance before they have to ask for help. Ask if they have any questions about what they are doing and if they understand what they are doing. Also make the students aware of the various situations in which a skill or strategy can be used as well as adaptations that will broaden its applicability to additional situations.

**Provide frequent feedback.** Feedback at multiple levels is preferred. For example, acknowledging a correct response is a form of brief feedback, while prompting a student who has given an incorrect answer by providing clues or repeating or rephrasing the question is another level. The teacher may also give positive feedback by stating the appropriate aspects of a student's performance. Finally, the teacher may give positive corrective feedback by making students aware of specific aspects of their performance that need work, reviewing concepts and asking questions, making suggestions for improvement, and having the students correct their work.

**Require mastery.** Require students to master one task before going on to the next. When tasks are assigned, tell the students the criteria that define mastery and the different ways mastery can be obtained. When mastery is achieved on one aspect or portion of the task, give students corrective feedback to let them know what aspects they have mastered and what aspects still need more work. When the task is complete, let the students know that mastery was reached.

**Resources**


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